

MEDIA RELEASE:

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Delayed health procedures threaten ‘shadow pandemic’ in NSW

Health insurers are bracing for an increase in complex NSW hospitalisations once COVID-19 restrictions end.

New research by Members Health, the peak body for Australia’s not-for-profit and member owned health insurers, has revealed concerning declines in the number of eligibility checks for serious health conditions.

“The data we are seeing signals alarming future demand for the treatment of complex and very serious health conditions,” warned Matthew Koce, CEO of Members Health.

“We run the risk of a second, shadow pandemic driven by people delaying important health assessments and interventions due to COVID-19.”

At the beginning of the month, eligibility checks for skin-related procedures, such as time-critical removal of skin cancers had slumped 25 per cent, according to Members Health’s research. Checks relating to kidney and bladder procedures had dropped 24 per cent; gynaecology related checks had decreased 22 per cent; gastrointestinal endoscopy checks had declined 11 per cent; and heart and vascular related checks had fallen 25 per cent.

“A bright spot where checks have defied the trend and rebounded strongly are chemotherapy, radiotherapy and immunotherapy for cancer,” Mr Koce said.

Eligibility checks are a leading indicator of current and future healthcare demand. Hospitals conduct checks with health insurers to determine patient eligibility to private health benefits prior to admission. Members Health’s research collated data from 22 individual health insurers.

“Delaying important health assessments and treatment can have devastating consequences. In some cases even a short delay can mean the difference between life and death. It is that serious,” Mr Koce said.

“We especially urge people who haven’t seen their GP in recent times to please make an appointment today to avoid a potentially far worse, or complex health issue.

“If something feels like it is not quite right, you notice an unusual blemish on your skin or you are due for a health check, then don’t put it off. Go and see your GP now.”

NSW hospitals are preparing to resume all categories of elective surgery from next week, following a period of lockdowns and restrictions on permitted procedures.

“Health insurers stand ready to fund the large rebound in healthcare treatment that is anticipated and to support the amazing efforts of our hospitals and healthcare providers,” Mr Koce said.

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NSW eligibility checks by clinical category as at 2 October 2021

Percentages represent current levels of eligibility checks as compared to normal levels (100%)

Gastrointestinal endoscopy	Heart and vascular system	Cataracts	Bone, joint and muscle	Kidney and bladder	Digestive system	Chemotherapy, radiotherapy and immunotherapy for cancer	Pain management	Skin	Gynaecology
89%	75%	80%	77%	76%	75%	112%	86%	75%	78%

Members Health is the peak industry body for an alliance of 26 health funds that are not-for-profit or part of a member-owned group. They all share the common ethic of putting their members' health before profit. Our funds represent the interests of more than 3.9 million Australians.

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